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Annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children

Summary

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/245, the present annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children provides an overview of major initiatives and developments to sustain and scale up efforts to safeguard children's freedom from violence and advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It highlights the strategic milestone that will be reached in 2019, the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, during which the high-level political forum on sustainable development will review progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16, including its target to end all forms of violence against children, and the Assembly will mobilize accelerated action for the further implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

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I. Introduction

1. In the present report, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children reviews key global, regional and national developments and gives an overview of results achieved in safeguarding children's freedom from violence.

2. Guided by General Assembly resolution 62/141, which established her mandate, the Special Representative is a global, independent advocate for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children in all settings.

3. In its resolution 72/245, the General Assembly reaffirmed its support for the work of the Special Representative, recognizing the progress she has achieved and the consolidated partnerships she has promoted, and welcomed her efforts to mainstream the recommendations of the United Nations study on violence against children (see A/61/299) in international, regional and national agendas, including through regional and thematic consultations, field missions and studies addressing emerging concerns.

4. Realizing that every child's right to freedom from violence is a fundamental dimension of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations study on violence against children highlighted the pervasive extent of violence and its impact on children's lives and identified critical steps to ensure its prevention and elimination. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its ambitious vision of a world free from fear and from violence, including a distinct target (target 2 of Sustainable Development Goal 16) to end all forms of violence against children, provided new impetus to global efforts to reduce the risk of violence in children's lives and ensure the effective protection of victims.

5. Thanks to the mobilization created by that important process of consolidating commitments and actions, significant progress has been made with regard to the prevention of, and response to, violence against children. New international standards on protecting children from violence have been adopted, new partnerships and alliances have been formed, information campaigns have raised awareness of positive investment in prevention and the negative impact of violence on child development and global initiatives have been undertaken to tackle violence, including bullying, domestic violence, sexual violence, online violence and harmful practices. Significant regional initiatives support national efforts to strengthen the prevention and monitoring of and response to children's exposure to violence. Close to 100 countries have adopted comprehensive national policy agendas on violence against children, and many have enacted legislation to prohibit physical, psychological and sexual violence and to support child victims. Important steps have been taken to consolidate national data systems and research regarding the scale and nature of violence against children and effective prevention strategies and to improve the monitoring of progress towards its elimination.

6. Ending all forms of violence against children is crucial to safeguarding children's rights and to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Failing to reach target 2 of Goal 16 would compromise millions of children, threatening potential gains across the entire 2030 Agenda with respect to education, health, gender equality, poverty eradication, social inclusion and justice for all.

7. Violence goes hand-in-hand with deprivation and cycles of vulnerability, leading to risks of poor health, poor school performance and long-term welfare dependency. In early childhood, the impact of violence is serious and often irreversible. As children grow, their exposure to violence becomes part of a continuum, at times persisting over generations. Moreover, violence is associated

with far-reaching costs, diverting billions of dollars from social spending, slowing economic development and eroding States' human and social capital.

8. Steady investment in children can prevent those high costs. Evidence shows that early childhood violence prevention programmes provide high investment returns, as highlighted below.

9. While half of those living in extreme poverty are children, and half of the world's children are affected by violence every year, budget allocations to address children's well-being are often inadequate. Unlike other dimensions of child well-being, spending to address violence against children is not systematically monitored and there is no international methodology for tracking and recording allocations, whether from official development assistance, domestic resources or other financial flows.

10. In an era of big data and real-time information, better tracking of spending is not only possible, it is necessary. The Special Representative remains committed to working with partners to strengthen the monitoring of spending on violence prevention.

11. Children's widespread exposure to violence is well documented in United Nations reports, academic research and in children's own heartbreaking stories. A recent United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report[1] presented data on violent discipline and exposure to abuse during early childhood, violence at school, violent deaths among adolescents and sexual violence in childhood and adolescence. It revealed alarming levels of violence affecting very young children, often within children's circles of trust, and renewed the call in the United Nations study on violence against children for every country to develop a national prevention and response strategy.

12. The international learning initiative Know Violence in Childhood published a global report for 2017 entitled "Ending violence in childhood" that reviewed critical research and data across regions. Its findings can help stimulate action to ensure that all children grow up free from violence and develop to their full potential.

13. To advance progress towards target 2 of Goal 16, the World Health Organization issued a handbook that supported the implementation of INSPIRE,[2] a set of evidence-based strategies to reduce violence against children. It provides detailed information and guidance regarding child-related sectors, including health, social welfare, education and criminal justice.

14. The Special Representative, in cooperation with United Nations partners, continued to support policy developments to accelerate progress in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The protection of children from bullying and cyberbullying gained special attention through three consultations that informed the development of the forthcoming report of the Secretary-General, which is to be presented to the General Assembly at its seventy-third session (see resolution 71/176).

15. The International Symposium on School Violence and Bullying: From Evidence to Action, hosted by the Government of the Republic of Korea, in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Ewha Womans University and the Special Representative, brought together United Nations agencies, Governments, civil society, academia and young people. A multi-stakeholder platform

[1] UNICEF, *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents* (New York, 2017). Available at www.unicef.org/publications/files/Violence_in_the_lives_of_children_and_adolescents.pdf.

[2] Available at www.who.int/iris/handle/10665/272996.

for data and research was launched to address the prevalence of bullying and school violence and to gather evidence on interventions.

16. In December 2017, China hosted the fourth World Internet Conference, which included a forum entitled "Safeguarding the future: online protection of underage users". Organized in cooperation with UNICEF and the Special Representative, the forum highlighted opportunities the Internet brings to children, the risks of exposure to online abuse, the importance of legislation to ensure children's protection and the role of the information and communications technology industry in placing the protection of children at the heart of technology and product innovation and in developing safeguarding standards.

17. A regional consultation on the protection of children against bullying and cyberbullying in the Americas, organized in April 2018 by the Government of Mexico in cooperation with the Special Representative and UNICEF, included participation by Governments, civil society and other stakeholders in Latin America and the Caribbean. In cooperation with children and adolescents, the regional consultation reviewed national policies, developments in legislation and data and expressed commitment to working towards a region free from all forms of violence against children.

18. In February 2018, Sweden hosted the first End Violence Solutions Summit, gathering children, Governments, United Nations organizations, representatives of civil society and religious, academic and private sector leaders to share and promote solutions to prevent and respond to violence. The Special Representative's keynote address recalled the significant progress made in children's protection and the imperative to advance with a deep sense of urgency.

19. Guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, participants reaffirmed their commitment to a child's right to freedom from violence at the centre of political agendas, and to place children, especially the most vulnerable, at the heart of the progress review of the 2030 Agenda to be held in 2019.

20. The Special Representative supported the development of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and a global compact on refugees. Every minute, 20 people are forced to flee their homes because of violence, persecution or conflict. Children represent more than half the world's refugee population, with tens of thousands of girls and boys unaccompanied or separated from their families while on the move.

21. These children are as much running with violence as running from violence, including civil conflict and community violence, harassment by gangs, armed group recruitment and political instability. They embark on a perilous, uncertain journey, often at the mercy of unscrupulous smuggling and trafficking networks. Their daily travelling companions are fear, anxiety and the threat of violence. The children often fail to benefit from the protection to which they are entitled. At times they are separated from family members or placed in crowded facilities with unrelated adults where they are at risk of being harassed, abused and trafficked. For perpetrators of violence against children, impunity prevails.

22. Guided by the best interests of the child, the implementation of the global compacts provides a crucial opportunity to transform that vicious cycle of violence and exploitation into a virtuous cycle of protection for children on the move. To support that process, the Special Representative is developing a thematic report in collaboration with United Nations partners, Governments, civil society organizations and independent children's rights institutions.

23. Recognizing the critical role the private sector can play in advancing progress on the elimination of violence against children, the Special Representative and UNICEF issued a joint report entitled "The private sector and the prevention of violence against children in Latin America and the Caribbean",[1] during the first International Summit on Child Protection in Travel and Tourism, held in Bogotá in June 2018. The report presents positive private sector practices in the region to protect children from violence and to increase business investment in prevention strategies.

24. To protect children from exploitation in travel and tourism, the Summit called for stronger evidence to inform a global awareness campaign, enhanced online hotlines, child-sensitive approaches to assist and ensure the reintegration of victims and an end to impunity.

25. To share knowledge and mobilize expertise and financial resources for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the Special Representative supports strategic partnerships, including the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, Alliance 8.7 (a global alliance with the goal of eradicating forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and child labour), the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Promoting Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, the Task Force on Justice and the Global Youth Partnership for the Sustainable Development Goals.

26. Those are significant developments. But the urgent need to ensure the protection of children from violence has not diminished. Every five minutes a child dies because of violence. Every year, at least 1 billion children — half the world's children — suffer violence. They are intentionally targeted in politically driven processes, manipulated by organized crime, forced to flee armed and gang violence, sold and exploited for economic gain, groomed by abusers online, disciplined by violent means, sexually assaulted in the privacy of their homes, neglected in institutions, abused in detention centres, bullied in schools and stigmatized and tortured as a result of superstitious beliefs or harmful practices.

27. In some communities, children are abused as scapegoats for family or community misfortune and illness. They suffer stigma, abandonment, violent punishment and ritual killings if they are accused or perceived as witches or, in certain cases, if their parents have been accused of witchcraft.

28. Being branded a witch is a form of psychological violence, and the associated stigmatization and exclusion may lead to killing, mutilation or other serious forms of violence that are tantamount to torture. For highly vulnerable and socially excluded children, such as children with albinism or disabilities, orphans, children who were born prematurely or those simply deemed "different", the risk of violence is high.

29. Violent incidents are underreported and concealed because of fear and social pressure, including from traditional healers for whom witchcraft practices are a source of income. Police and justice systems may be ill-prepared or lack the resources to act, while children lack counselling, recovery and social reintegration services. This is a topic of high concern for the Special Representative, who continues to collaborate with partners to achieve the abandonment of those practices.

[1] Available at www.unicef.org/lac/en/reports/private-sector-and-prevention-violence-against-children.

II. Supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and accelerating progress towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children

30. The Special Representative remains committed to seizing the unique opportunity presented by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to accelerate progress towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children.

31. Since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, many States Members of the United Nations have developed comprehensive sustainable development plans to guide national coordinated action to reach the Sustainable Development Goals.

A. Promoting follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

32. The high-level political forum on sustainable development provides a strategic platform to ensure that children are placed at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. Through her participation in high-level intergovernmental meetings and cooperation with regional organizations and permanent missions, the Special Representative continues to advocate for the strategic use of voluntary national reviews and the high-level political forum by States and other stakeholders to share positive developments and lessons learned and to identify challenges and opportunities to accelerate progress in the protection of children from violence.

33. In 2018, 46 States submitted voluntary national reviews and several gave special attention to the protection of children, reaffirming their commitment to the prevention and elimination of violence and showing how children's rights and sustainable development are interlinked. The voluntary national reviews documented significant measures taken to advance progress towards target 2 of Sustainable Development Goal 16, including the adoption of national plans and policies, the enacting of legislation, the strengthening of institutions and partnerships, the training of professionals and the consolidation of data and research.

34. The theme of the high-level political forum in 2018 was "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies". The ministerial declaration[4] expressed strong commitment to placing children at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. It recognized that developing the human capital required to build sustainable and resilient societies begins by investing in children, adolescents and youth to ensure they grow up free from all forms of violence. It emphasized the importance of ensuring meaningful participation by children, particularly the most vulnerable, as critical agents of change in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

35. The high-level political forum paid specific attention to Goal 11, providing an opportunity to promote national implementation of the New Urban Agenda (see resolution 71/256) and to support the leadership of local authorities in promoting city plans, guided by the best interests of the child and with children's active participation.

36. Half the world's population live in cities, and half of that population are children. Increasing urbanization, combined with high levels of economic inequality and endemic poverty, make the risk of urban violence particularly acute. As the Special Representative highlighted in her thematic study *Protecting Children Affected*

[4] See E/2018/L.20-E/HLPF/2018/L.2 for a draft version of the declaration.

by Armed Violence in the Community,[5] building schools and urban spaces that are safe for children, investing in public safety measures and ensuring access to justice can help mitigate the risks of violence faced by children in urban settings. Children must be at the centre of urban planning, and policies must be informed by children's views and experience.

37. That was also the key message of young delegates from Mexico and the Dominican Republic to the high-level political forum, who paraphrased Stacia Tauscher when they said: "Countries worry about what a child will become tomorrow; but they forget that the child is someone today." They also stated: "It is critical to invest in children's empowerment, and their ideas, experience and recommendations remain essential to reach the [Sustainable Development Goals] and to promote a safe, inclusive and committed society."

B. 2019: a strategic milestone to strengthen children's freedom from violence

38. The year 2019 marks a strategic milestone on the path towards ensuring children's freedom from violence, as it is the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the most widely ratified United Nations treaty, and the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the theme of which is "Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality", will be held that July. The forum will focus on four Sustainable Development Goals of special relevance to ending violence against children: Goal 4, on ensuring inclusive, safe and equitable quality education; Goal 8, on eliminating child labour; Goal 10, on reducing inequalities; and Goal 16, on building peaceful, just and inclusive societies, and its second target, on ending all forms of violence against children.

39. In addition, in September 2019, world leaders will gather at United Nations Headquarters in New York, during the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly, to review progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to mobilize accelerated action for its second implementation phase.

40. The convergence of those critical processes offers the international community an opportunity which must be seized: a unique chance to make a quantum leap in strengthening the protection of children from violence.

41. To inform that process and ensure that distinct attention is paid to progress made towards the Sustainable Development Goals related to protection from violence, the Special Representative will actively engage in the reviews of the 2030 Agenda during the high-level political forum on sustainable development and the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly in 2019. In cooperation with a wide range of partners, a global thematic report on ending violence against children will be produced. The report will discuss the efforts of Governments and the initiatives of a wide range of stakeholders, including United Nations entities, regional organizations, civil society, professional associations, academia, religious leaders and children's ombudsmen, to mobilize support and influence progress.

42. The thematic report will take stock of progress made towards ending violence against children during the first four years of the 2030 Agenda, documenting lessons learned, acknowledging challenges and anticipating the strategic actions needed to realize its vision of a world free from fear and violence. A significant component of

[5] Available at https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/documents/publications/2._protecting_children_affected_by_armed_violence_in_the_community.pdf.

the report will reflect the views, experiences and recommendations of young people, who are crucial agents of change in this process.

III. Mainstreaming children's protection from violence in national policy agendas

43. The Special Representative continued to support the consolidation of national efforts to address violence against children, including through country visits to Andorra, Barbados, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Greece, Indonesia, Japan, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Portugal and Sweden.

44. The past year was marked by significant developments for children's protection from violence, as highlighted in the voluntary national reviews presented at the 2018 high-level political forum.

45. Albania [6] adopted significant policy and legislative measures to address children's exposure to violence, including physical and sexual abuse, bullying and increases in registered crimes against children. Those include: Children's Agenda 2020; the Law for the Protection of Children's Rights; and the Criminal Justice for Children Code.

46. Armenia [7] enacted a new law in 2018 to address high levels of domestic violence against children, including physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers. In addition, a Child Rights Unit was established in the office of the Human Rights Defender and an interagency multisectoral Council on Access to Justice for Children was established by the Ministry of Justice.

47. In Australia, [8] violence against women, domestic and family violence were addressed by the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022. The national "Stop it at the Start" primary prevention campaign targeting influencers of young people was launched to challenge attitudes supporting violence and generate long-term cultural change.

48. In Bhutan, [9] a study on violence against children conducted in 2016 shed light on the vulnerability of children to violence, exploitation and abuse, including children with disabilities, those from broken homes or living with extended families, and children from low economic backgrounds. The establishment of "law clubs" in schools and the promotion of legal knowledge under the "Know the Law to Protect Your Rights" series helped address those concerns and increase awareness of children's rights.

49. In 2017, Canada launched "It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence", a strategy based on preventing violence, providing support for survivors and promoting responsive legal and justice systems. The Criminal Code was amended to enhance children's protection from sexual exploitation and cyberbullying, and funding was allocated to enhance capacity to respond to public reporting and support the removal of online sexual abuse materials.

50. Ireland highlighted its ambitious vision for a country where the rights of all children and young people are respected and protected, their voices are heard and they

[6] See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20257ALBANIA_VNR_2018_FINAL2.pdf.

[7] See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19586Armenia_VNR_2018.pdf.

[8] See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19592VNR_final_approved_version.pdf.

[9] See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19369Bhutan_NSDGR_Bhutan_2018.pdf.

are supported to realize their potential now and in the future.[10] The National Policy Framework for Young People 2014–2020 addresses domestic violence, violence against women and girls and human trafficking.

51. Jamaica[11] revised its National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence to guide implementation up to 2023. The "Break the Silence" campaign implemented in 2015 to increase the reporting of child abuse by adults resulted in an 18.7 per cent increase in cases reported.

52. In Lebanon,[12] the 2014 law on domestic violence provides the framework to protect children, supported by criminal code amendments to strengthen the protection of girls and women from sexual violence and exploitation. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education, in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and UNICEF, developed a child protection policy which includes a comprehensive methodology for the early identification and referral of cases of school violence.

53. Lithuania has a National Programme for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Provision of Assistance to Victims 2014–2020, and in 2017 guidelines for the implementation of violence prevention in schools came into force to promote a safe school environment free from violence and bullying.

54. The past year also saw significant progress in the development and implementation of comprehensive national plans and policies to protect children from violence.

55. Mexico and Paraguay launched comprehensive action plans developed through a participatory process, aligned with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2030 Agenda. Mexico's national plan[13] identified critical priority actions: legislative reforms to address child marriage and prohibit all forms of violence against children; a national campaign on the prevention of violence against children; investment in online safety; enhanced mechanisms for counselling, complaints and reporting on incidents of violence; the strengthening of coordination; and an online survey to gather children's views and recommendations to inform implementation of the plan.[14]

56. The national plan of Paraguay[15] is overseen by the National Commission for Prevention and Response to Violence against Children. The plan uses the recommendations of children and adolescents, who play a critical role in its implementation, regarding raising public awareness of the various manifestations of violence and the mechanisms for reporting it, promoting information about the plan and supporting advocacy efforts in communities.

57. In 2018, Chile adopted a national policy on children and adolescents for 2015–2025.[16] The protection of children from violence is a key priority within families, schools and other settings. A law was passed establishing a "defender of children's rights"[17] in January 2018.

[10] See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19382Ireland_Voluntary_National_Review_2018.pdf, p. 216.

[11] See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19499JamaicaMain_VNR_Report.pdf, p. 95.

[12] See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19624LebanonVNR2018.pdf.

[13] See www.unicef.org/mexico/spanish/PLAN_ACCION_FINAL.pdf.

[14] See www.gob.mx/participa/opinna-dime-como-te-tratan.

[15] See www.snna.gov.py/archivos/documentos/Plan%20de%20Accion%20Pais_r1v7aq8u.pdf.

[16] See http://observatorioninez.consejoinfancia.gob.cl/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Plan-Accion_Ni%C3%B1ez.VF_.pdf.

[17] See https://www.leychile.cl/Navegar?idNorma=1114173.

58. In December 2017, the Special Representative participated in the launch by Cambodia of the Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Violence against Children 2017–2021. The Plan was informed by findings from a household survey on violence against children conducted in 2014, and includes prevention and improved services for victims.

59. The Philippines Plan of Action to End Violence against Children was launched in 2018, and was informed by a national baseline study on violence against children conducted in 2016. The study documented the high incidence of home violence and the serious risk of children being exposed to online abuse. The Plan addresses the diverse dimensions of violence and stresses the need to strengthen the child protection system, ensure children's access to protective services and identify key roles and responsibilities within the Government for the Plan's implementation.

60. In 2018, the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic launched a multisectoral plan of action to prevent violence against children on the basis of the findings of a national survey conducted in 2014. The survey was the first assessment of the extent and nature of violence against children in the country and helped identify the priority actions needed. As noted by the Special Representative at the launch of the plan, those developments provide a critical contribution to accelerated progress towards target 2 of Goal 16 and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

61. Spain is developing its third National Strategic Plan for Children and Adolescents (2018–2022) to address child vulnerability, including trafficking. Legislation is being finalized to protect children from all forms of violence, including very young children abused at home.[18]

62. Support for legislative measures on the protection of children from violence remained a high priority for the Special Representative, including in her missions to Andorra, Barbados, Cambodia, China and Japan.

63. Since 2006, the number of countries with a comprehensive legal ban on violence against children has more than tripled, reaching over 50 in 2017. Benin, Ireland, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lithuania, Mongolia, Montenegro, Paraguay, Peru, Slovenia and Viet Nam are the most recent countries to have enacted such a ban.

64. Sweden was the first country in the world to prohibit by law all forms of violence against children. In 2018, the Swedish Parliament adopted a bill to incorporate the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Swedish law to ensure that the best interests of the child were a guiding policymaking reference.

65. Peru adopted new legislation[19] in 2018 to support the implementation of its legal ban on corporal punishment. The new provisions require mandatory reporting by teachers and other professionals responsible for children, and recognize the crucial role played by municipalities in the prevention and elimination of violence, including through the provision of support to families and promoting positive parenting initiatives. In addition, new safeguards were foreseen to ensure the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all child rights-related public and private proceedings.[20]

[18] See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/203295182018_VNR_Report_Spain_EN_ddghpbrgsp.pdf, p. 78.

[19] See Peru, decree No. 003-2018-MIMP (9 June 2018), *El Peruano, Índice de Normas Legales* (June 2018).

[20] See Peru, decree No. 002-2018-MIMP (1 June 2018), *El Peruano, Índice de Normas Legales* (June 2018).

66. In 2018, good practices and lessons learned on strengthening children's legal protection from all forms of violence, including corporal punishment, were highlighted at various high-level meetings. In April, the Government of Mexico hosted an inter-American consultation that reaffirmed the commitment of Governments from across Latin America and the Caribbean to work towards a region free from violence.

67. In May, the President of Malta hosted the High-Level Global Conference on the Universal Prohibition of Corporal Punishment. The declaration adopted by participating Governments, international and regional organizations, professional associations, civil society and academia reiterated the strong normative foundation for children's protection provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and recognized the opportunity provided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to promote global efforts towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children.

IV. Reinforcing regional processes to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

68. Cooperation with regional organizations and institutions is a major component of the Special Representative's strategy to accelerate progress towards protecting children from violence. Regional organizations and institutions are strategic allies, and those strong partnerships have helped to place violence against children at the centre of the regional policy agenda, while at the same time enhancing the accountability of States and supporting their national implementation efforts.

69. The Special Representative has hosted high-level regional consultations in the South and Central American, Caribbean, South Asian, Pacific, European and Arab regions. Six regional monitoring reports have been issued and periodic review meetings were conducted to sustain and accelerate progress.

70. Significant regional political commitments and implementation road maps have been adopted (see A/HRC/19/64), and a new generation of regional plans on violence against children are being developed, aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They have strengthened national legislation and public policies, consolidated data and research and promoted awareness-raising campaigns.

71. To enhance that process, the Special Representative organizes an high-level cross-regional round table with regional organizations each year. The forum is a unique strategic mechanism within the United Nations system to enhance cross-regional and South-South cooperation, engage in policy dialogue, share knowledge and good practices, identify trends and pressing challenges and advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

72. The eighth annual cross-regional round table took place in May 2018 in Thimphu, and was co-organized with the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children, in cooperation with the Government of Bhutan.

73. The round table gave special attention to accelerating progress towards the targets of the 2030 Agenda related to the prevention of violence, including on the protection of children from harmful practices and child marriage, and the role of religious leaders in tackling violence against children.[21]

[21] See https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/general/conclusions_recommendations_bhutan_2018.pdf.

74. Participating regional organizations recognized the strategic opportunities provided in 2019 by the upcoming review of Sustainable Development Goal 16 at the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the first review of the progress of the 2030 Agenda at the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly and the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

75. To leverage those opportunities, participants in the round table committed to contributing to the global thematic report on ending violence against children referred to in paragraph 41 above.

76. In 2019, the Special Representative will co-host the ninth cross-regional round table with the African Child Policy Forum in Addis Ababa.

77. The Special Representative pursued engagement with the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Special Rapporteur of the African Union on Ending Child Marriage and subregional organizations and institutions.

78. Much progress has been achieved in ending child marriage. The African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage promotes the rights of girls and has received commitments from its member States towards ending that practice. Twenty-four countries have joined the campaign, and the second African Girls' Summit on Ending Child Marriage in Africa, held in Ghana in August 2018, was a strategic opportunity to consolidate efforts.

79. In 2018, the Day of the African Child was devoted to the 2030 Agenda and the efforts made related to its theme: "Leave No Child Behind for Africa's Development". It highlighted the need for strong investment in essential services and in children's protection from violence to advance social and economic progress across Africa.

80. At the subregional level, in December 2017, Heads of State across the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) adopted a strategic framework for strengthening national child protection systems to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and the exploitation of children, signalling a high-level commitment to end violence against children.

81. The ECOWAS strategic framework aims to reduce children's vulnerability, build their resilience and ensure their protection from violence, highlighting five priority areas: sexual, physical, and emotional violence; child marriage; children on the move; child labour; and civil registration, vital statistics and birth registration.

82. The East African Community met in Kigali in November 2017 to promote progress in combating violence against children through the development of a regional framework for strengthening national child protection systems and community mechanisms.

83. Surveys on violence against children continued to support government advocacy, policy, planning and budgeting as well as the enacting of legislation to protect children from violence.[22] Rwanda is the most recent example, publishing the results of its national survey on violence against children and youth in May 2018.[23]

84. The Special Representative continued to collaborate with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member States, the ASEAN secretariat and the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children in the implementation of the 2015 ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the

[22] Eswatini, Malawi, Nigeria, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia completed national household surveys. Botswana, Uganda and Zimbabwe will launch their results in 2018, while Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique and Namibia are developing similar processes.

[23] See http://www.togetherforgirls.org/wp-content/uploads/Rwanda_VACYS_Summary_2018.05.17.pdf.

Elimination of Violence against Children. Aligned with the 2030 Agenda, the plan promotes national action towards the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals related to the prevention of violence.

85. During her annual dialogue in March 2018, the Special Representative urged representatives of the ASEAN Commission to seize the opportunity provided by the upcoming 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development to accelerate action towards protecting children from violence. She encouraged ASEAN to undertake a midterm review of the Regional Plan, building upon the significant baseline study conducted by UNICEF in collaboration with ASEAN member States and Commission representatives.

86. In South Asia, children's protection from violence was strengthened by the implementation of a regional plan of action for the prevention and elimination of child labour for 2016–2021 and the development of a regional strategy to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation. Implementation of the regional action plan on child marriage for 2015-2018 was pursued through the development of national action plans in Afghanistan and Nepal and a national multimedia campaign in Bangladesh.

87. A platform for religious leaders to promote children's rights in the region was launched in September 2018 in Kathmandu with support from UNICEF. In Bhutan, a national strategy and a plan of action for the protection of children in monastic institutions was developed for 2017–2022.

88. The South Asia Parliamentarian Platform for Children convened in Dhaka in May 2018, bringing together legislators from across the region to promote and safeguard children's rights, including their protection from violence.

89. The Special Representative continued her cooperation with the Organization of American States. At its ninety-second session, held in Barbados, the Inter-American Children's Institute adopted a resolution on violence against children,[24] reaffirming commitments by member States to promote the prevention and elimination of violence in all settings, in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also stressed the sharing of good practices and experiences, especially with regard to protecting children from sexual exploitation and the minimum age of criminal responsibility, and called for greater use of alternatives to depriving children of their liberty.

90. The Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) developed guidelines for the promotion of positive discipline and the prevention of violence against children that are aligned with the 2030 Agenda. The guidelines will help advance regional commitments to implementation, including the enacting and enforcement of laws banning all forms of violence against children. The guidelines commit to developing a regional plan for 2018–2023 to promote positive discipline and violence prevention.

91. Cooperation with the Central American Integration System continued, and included high-level political dialogue between the Special Representative and the Secretary-General of the organization and technical experts. The Central American Integration System expressed its commitment to developing a regional policy on ending violence against children, aligned with the 2030 Agenda and the Central American road map on violence against children,[25] adopted in Santo Domingo in 2011.

[24] See https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/regions/enged_res_08_92-r17.pdf.

[25] See https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/documents/political_declarations/americas/hoja_de_ruta_centroamericana_sobre_violencia_contra_los_ninos_central_american_roadmap_on_violence_against_children.pdf.

92. The Special Representative continued engagement with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against children, including bilateral meetings with its Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission. The Commission promotes the strengthening of children's protection from violence, in accordance with international legal obligations, as a priority in its national development plans and national reviews within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The outcome document of the thematic debate of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on the rights of the child, adopted in April 2018, called on States to enact legislation guaranteeing the protection of children from exploitation and for the establishment of specific national mechanisms to enforce the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and called for action to abolish harmful practices. It highlighted the need for States to exercise due diligence to prohibit, prevent and investigate acts of violence against children, eliminate impunity and provide assistance to victims.

93. The Special Representative strengthened her collaboration with the Council of Europe, including implementation of the Council's Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016–2021).

94. Children's freedom from violence is a key pillar of the Council of Europe's Strategy. To give the topic distinct attention, a group of experts was established to document good practices and consolidate progress in violence prevention and response. Results will feed into the Strategy's midterm evaluation, to be hosted in June 2019 by the Government of France.

95. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted new standards on violence-related topics in April 2018 on safeguarding the rights of children of imprisoned parents[26] and, in July 2018, on the rights of the child in the digital environment.[27] The latter promotes children's empowerment and protection through the development of legislation and policies, the strengthening of national and international cooperation and enhanced partnerships with key stakeholders. Additional work was pursued regarding the rights of the child in migration, with special emphasis on age assessment and guardianship of unaccompanied and separated children.

96. In November 2017, the Special Representative participated in the European Union Forum on the Rights of the Child, which that year was devoted to children deprived of liberty. The Forum brought together representatives from European Union member States and institutions, as well as representatives from Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, civil society, international organizations and academia, and children's ombudsmen. Young people affected by deprivation of liberty also participated. Expressing their support for the global study on children deprived of liberty, requested by the General Assembly in resolution 69/157, special emphasis was placed on detention alternatives and on the rights of children affected by immigration detention, deprivation of liberty in care or health institutions and children whose parents were in prison. The Special Representative presented findings from research undertaken by her office with Latin American partners on the experience of young people whose parents are in detention (see also sect. VI below).

[26] See https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=090000168073b175.

[27] See https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/sites/violenceagainstchildren.un.org/files/documents/political_declarations/recomendation_of_the_committee_of_ministers_of_the_council_of_europe_to_member_states_on_guidelines_to_respect_protect_and_fulfil_the_rights_of_the_child_in_the_digital_environment.pdf.

V. Violence prevention must start in early childhood

97. Children are often exposed to violence early in life, and during infancy violence has its most devastating and long-lasting impact on children's development, with consequences that last into adulthood.

98. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the crucial role of early childhood development in creating peaceful, prosperous societies: target 2 of Sustainable Development Goal 4 specifically commits States to ensuring that all children have access to inclusive, quality early childhood education and care so they may acquire the knowledge and skills to fulfil their potential and participate fully in society as productive citizens.

99. Investing in early childhood and ending violence in children's lives are first and foremost a question of children's rights. Evidence continues to mount, however, that it is also a highly cost-effective strategy that leads to better health, education and social outcomes that increase national wealth, while at the same time reducing the social expenditures required to deal with the long-term consequences of childhood violence.

100. The most recent report of the Special Representative[28] highlights that violence prevention must start in early childhood, when investment can achieve a high return.

101. A nurturing and caring environment helps to secure children's health, nutrition, early learning and sense of belonging, promoting their self-esteem and improving their ability to handle stress and adversity. Scientific evidence shows that the human brain develops faster during its first 1,000 days than at any other stage of life, and during that crucial developmental period the foundation for a person's future well-being is laid.

102. However, early childhood is still seen primarily as a period of transition towards adult life, and there is insufficient awareness of the negative impact that violence has on children's health and development, or of the social returns from investment in a violence-free early childhood.

103. According to the UNICEF report *A Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents*,[29] close to 300 million children experience psychological aggression and/or physical punishment from their caregivers at home. In certain countries, shouting, yelling or screaming are common forms of discipline for children aged 1 year, and 176 million children under the age of 5 witness domestic violence.

104. Early childhood interventions may cost as little as $0.50 per child per year when combined with existing services. Yet lack of investment in early years may hold children back before they reach school age, resulting in a lifetime of disadvantage. A poor start in life can lead to a loss of roughly one fourth of an average adult income annually. In addition, countries may forfeit as much as twice their current gross domestic product in health and education expenditures.

105. The importance of a nurturing and caring environment for child development that includes good health, nutrition and stimulation is well established. Promoting positive attachments with caregivers helps children develop resilience, while early childhood interventions protect children against stress, laying the foundation for learning at home and at school.

106. Children subjected to violence, abuse and neglect in early childhood are more likely to later display a range of pathologies, including poor school performance, a

[28] See https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/news/violence-prevention-must-start-early-childhood.
[29] UNICEF, *A Familiar Face*.

greater probability of dropping out, anxiety, depression, ill health, risky behaviour and self-harm.

107. Longitudinal studies show that children exposed to maltreatment are more likely to be victims of violence later in life and to become perpetrators themselves. They are also at greater risk of engaging in criminal behaviour, while showing a tendency to minimize the seriousness of criminal acts.

108. Early childhood presents a unique window of opportunity to break the vicious cycle of violence. Evidence points to three key dimensions of successful national strategies.

109. First, protection of children in their early years begins with enacting a comprehensive legal ban on all forms of violence in all settings, including in the home, to send a clear message about practices that are unacceptable and non-negotiable and to help shape attitudes and behaviour. Today, more than 50 States have adopted explicit legal prohibitions on the use of violence as a form of discipline, correction or punishment, and many others are moving towards that goal.

110. Second, public policies are not neutral towards children. Investment in young children provides an important entry point to supporting families in their child-rearing responsibilities and protective roles, preventing child abandonment and placement in alternative care and supporting children at risk of violence. Parenting skills programmes coupled with social protection interventions help reduce the risk of social exclusion and deprivation, reduce family stress and address social norms condoning violent forms of child discipline.

111. Third, violence is a multifaceted phenomenon that can be addressed only through a multidisciplinary, multi-stakeholder approach. Effective cross-sectoral cooperation is needed, including with regard to health, nutrition, education and social and child protection, to address multiple risks faced by young children and their families.

112. Every child needs support in early childhood, but at-risk children from disadvantaged environments are least likely to receive it. Those children have truly been left behind. Disadvantaged families have fewer resources to invest in effective early childhood development. As a result, many at-risk children miss out on the growth and development that is the foundation for success in school, career and life.

113. Strong political leadership is vital to assuring the best start in life and the elimination of violence in early years. James Heckman, Nobel laureate in economics, states that "investing in early childhood education is a cost-effective strategy, even during a budget crisis" and leads to better education, health, social and economic outcomes that increase revenue and reduce the need for costly social spending. "The highest rate of return in early childhood development comes from investing as early as possible, from birth through age five, in disadvantaged [children and their] families."[30]

VI. Children as agents of change

114. Partnering with children is a crucial dimension of the Special Representative's mandate. Listening to children's voices and experiences is critical to realizing the vision of a world free from fear and violence set out by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As the ministerial declaration of the 2018 high-level

[30] James J. Heckman, "Invest in early childhood development: reduce deficits, strengthen the economy", The Heckman Equation, 2012. Available at https://heckmanequation.org/assets/2013/07/F_HeckmanDeficitPieceCUSTOM-Generic_052714-3-1.pdf.

political forum on sustainable development noted, children are important agents of change and their meaningful participation is vital to the effective implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda.

115. The United Nations study on violence against children (see A/61/299) was the first United Nations report drafted in collaboration with children and young people, and their involvement remains key in violence prevention and response, including their participation in advocacy, expert discussions and research development.

116. Violence is a priority concern for children, according to more than 800,000 young participants in consultations informing the development of the 2030 Agenda, and that concern was reaffirmed by an online opinion poll of migrant and refugee children conducted by the Special Representative and UNICEF. Of the more than 170,000 young people surveyed, a large percentage saw violence as a serious phenomenon associated with children's cross-border movements. Violence was identified as a key reason for children deciding to leave their countries, a serious challenge faced during their journeys and an ongoing problem upon their arrival in destination countries.

117. Violence, fear and insecurity were also top concerns expressed by children affected by detention. Detention is highly relevant for the global study on children deprived of liberty, which was requested by the General Assembly in resolution 69/157. The Special Representative chairs the United Nations task force set up to provide system-wide support to the development of the global study.

118. As a contribution to the global study and to capture children's voices and experiences, the Special Representative, in cooperation with UNICEF and civil society partners in Latin America, undertook consultations and organized focus groups with adolescents who had been deprived of liberty and with children whose parents were in detention.

119. In both cases, children tend to come from families affected by poverty and social exclusion, have been exposed to domestic violence and have limited access to basic social services. Many children in detention also have an incarcerated parent, showing how the deprivation of liberty can become an aggravating factor that triggers cycles of vulnerability.

120. These children's lives are often marked by the lack of a nurturing family environment, the absence of social protection and the weak capacity of the education system to support them, which may lead to school absenteeism and dropping out of school.

121. For children with an incarcerated parent, life is characterized by marginalization, ostracism and feeling rejected, avoided and feared by other children and their families. They often face bullying in school and sometimes feel treated as a delinquent.

122. These children may need to travel long hours or days to spend a few minutes with an incarcerated parent, whom they meet in overcrowded, unfriendly places, under the scrutiny of a security guard, while enduring body searches and condescending looks.

123. Incarceration puts an additional economic burden on the household. Children may feel pressed to work to support the family, at times in dangerous places and doing dangerous activities, where they are at risk of additional harm.

124. Nonetheless, these children often stay hopeful and, especially when it comes to younger children, they remain resilient and optimistic about their futures. They also convey important recommendations for action. They appreciate being able to visit and maintain a bond with their detained parents, even if the act of entering prison is

traumatizing. They want better-quality and longer visiting times with more humane, dignified treatment. They call for safe spaces for dialogue with parents in detention and for safe, supportive environments where they can discuss this aspect of their lives.

125. Children also call for psychosocial and financial support for themselves and their families, and for a welcoming, protective education system. Moreover, they stress the need for measures to prevent and address violence whenever it is committed, including urgent changes to arrest and search procedures. The arrest of a family member can be a brutal experience and children strongly believe police should never be allowed to enter a home and assault their parents.

126. Violence and deprivation of liberty often go hand in hand. Adolescents in detention expressed deep concern about physical, mental and sexual violence. Violence is generally tolerated as a form of discipline, self-defence and survival, with children at risk of becoming indifferent to violence.

127. While most detained children are boys, a smaller percentage are girls. There are also lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children who suffer particularly severe forms of discrimination and exposure to sexual violence by peers and adults.

128. For many children surveyed, detention means a life of violence with multiple deprivations and little hope for a positive future. Poor conditions with overcrowded cells create a dehumanizing situation for children. Access to education, recreation and health may be restricted as a form of punishment. As a result, children suffer depression and emotional and mental health problems, and self-harm and suicide attempts are also reported.

129. The overwhelming desire of these young people is to live with their families and friends. Many, however, view the future with pessimism: society appears full of prejudice against them and is apparently unprepared to support their social inclusion and reintegration.

VII. Looking forward

130. The Convention on the Rights of the Child promises every child the right to a life free from fear and violence. The United Nations study on violence against children highlighted the pervasiveness of violence against children and identified key strategies for its prevention and elimination. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, new impetus was provided to national implementation efforts and international cooperation to prevent violence against children.

131. Guided by the human rights imperative of freeing children from violence, evidence gathered in recent years of strategies that work, the inspiring participation, efforts and resilience of children and the ambitious vision and historic opportunity offered by the 2030 Agenda, a quantum leap in the prevention of and response to violence against children is possible.

132. The Special Representative remains deeply committed to advancing progress with regard to the protection of children and to using strategic opportunities to mobilize increased political commitment and action towards building a world free from fear and from violence, with no child left behind.

133. The opportunities to accelerate progress towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children provided in 2019 by the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the review by the General Assembly of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and the review by the high-level political forum of target 2 of Sustainable Development Goal 16 will guide the work of the Special Representative, with particular emphasis on the following:

(a) Supporting national efforts to mainstream children's protection from violence into national policy agendas, furthering the enacting and enforcement of legislation banning all forms of violence, further consolidating data and research and, with regard to the voluntary national reviews to be presented at the 2019 high-level political forum on sustainable development, promoting the inclusion of assessments of progress in national efforts to protect children from violence, as well as the identification of gaps where further actions are needed;

(b) Supporting global, regional and national reviews of progress in protecting children from violence by preparing a global thematic report on ending violence against children, taking stock of positive developments and lessons learned since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and identifying persisting and emerging challenges and opportunities for positive change;

(c) Raising awareness of the impact of violence in early childhood and mobilizing greater efforts to enhance prevention and break the cycle of violence, poverty and exclusion in children's lives, including through social protection and quality services, to ensure that children are able to develop in a violence-free environment;

(d) Supporting the implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and a global compact on refugees to safeguard the rights of children at all times, including through a thematic report on the violence these children encounter and measures taken to ensure a continuum of protection in their lives;

(e) Consolidating evidence on prevention and response strategies, including research on a child's right to participate in recreation, play and sports, as well as efforts to combat the risk of violence. While sport creates a unique bond among children and enables them to enjoy and promote the values of respect for human dignity, inclusion and team building, it also exposes them to the risk of violence. Children may suffer bullying, emotional abuse and humiliation on the basis of their gender, body shape or performance, or be exposed to degrading initiation rituals or endure sexual abuse by their coaches. To perform better, children may be exposed to extreme nutrition and weight-loss regimes that lead to eating disorders and may be forced to use performance-enhancing substances. Some children are denied sufficient rest and care and are required to perform when injured. This is an area where little information is available and where efforts are needed, in collaboration with Governments, intergovernmental organizations, sports federations and children themselves, to ensure children's healthy development and prevent the risk of violence.

134. Through her global mandate, the Special Representative remains deeply committed to mobilizing action and engaging the support of people from all walks of life towards the elimination of all forms of violence against children and realizing the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The world's children deserve nothing less!